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"OUR MILITARY FEVER

BY

D. C. PEARSON

CAPTAIN SECOND CAVALRY

UNITED STATES ARMY

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1895

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“OUR MILITARY FEVER.”

The following was published in October, 1894, by one of the most able and influential journals in New England:

“OUR MILITARY FEVER.

“To the Editor of the *Transcript*: It is not a pleasant task to protest against public opinion; neither is it easy to elbow your way through a crowd going in the opposite direction. Nothing but a sense of duty, therefore, can compel me to raise my voice against the growing military fever of the American people. Let me confess at once to a deep interest in military matters. In my travels, I have become familiar with the armies of Germany, France, Italy, Austria, and especially of Switzerland. Everywhere the tread of soldiery, the drums, the crack of musketry have attracted me. It has been part of my work in historical research, to visit and examine battlefields, to learn something about tactics and strategy. At one time, I imagined that a great military establishment was just what was needed in the United States to weld public spirit into a more vigorous form, to divert the attention of our men from the present all devouring commercialism, and to give our male population a much needed set-up. That is what I thought until I began to study social and economic questions, and to realize that militarism is a part of the old order of things which the world is outgrowing. Whatever the glories of its past may be, the regular army of the United States is to-day an antiquated survival—as out of place in this progressive nation of sixty-five millions as would be a coat of mail upon a modern battlefield, or a wooden ship in the next naval encounter. No army of mercenaries deserves popular support; and in truth, even to raise the relatively insignificant force of twenty-six thousand men, great difficulty is experienced. About one-third of the accepted recruits are foreigners, and not a few illiterate. Almost ten per cent. of the army deserts each year. Courts-martial are alarmingly frequent and our military prisons are kept well filled. The regular army is as much a last resort for American-born men, as domestic service is for women. Noth-

“but the pressure of hard times can ever fill the one or the other
 “with good material. Furthermore, the process by which the
 “majority of officers is obtained for this force creates a distinct
 “hierarchical caste which is incongruous with a true democracy.
 “And in order to maintain this force of Federal policemen, the
 “people of the United States spend on an average over forty-
 “eight millions of dollars a year, making an annual cost per man
 “nearly five times as great as Germany with her magnificent
 “army. Now a demand is heard from headquarters for an addi-
 “tion to the regular army. Upon what plea? Partly on account
 “of the danger of foreign invasion, but principally to quell popu-
 “lar movements. The first danger may be dismissed without a
 “moment’s consideration. A new era is even now dawning upon
 “civilized communities, in which mere international questions
 “will be completely over-shadowed by the great social and econ-
 “omic questions. Diplomacy, which has played at chess too long
 “with the nations, will soon become a lost art. The last mon-
 “archs who may still have power to produce war, will fall from
 “their genealogical trees like over-ripe apples. It ought to be
 “our glory not to be prepared to make war upon our neighbors,
 “or even to repel an attack from the outside, but to settle any
 “and every foreign dispute by peaceful means, and arbitration if
 “need be. * * * *

(Signed) W. D. McCrackan.”

In his “History of Civilization in England,” Buckle says: “In
 “our time we frequently meet with men whose erudition ministers
 “to their ignorance, and who, the more they read, the less they
 “know.”

And Locke, in his “Essay on Human Understanding,” has
 noticed this “learned ignorance for which many men are remark-
 able.”

We do not propose to look any further to discover to what sort
 or class of readers and writers our critic belongs. After read-
 ing the foregoing specimen of “learned ignorance,” one is at loss
 to decide if it be worthy of consideration. But, thinking of the
 great probability of its acceptance as sound doctrine by many in-
 telligent readers, under the circumstances of its publication, and
 in view of the bonds we are under to deliver an essay, we address
 ourselves to the subject of our Military Fever, so-called.

If Mr. McCrackan were writing under the spur of the necessity of earning his daily bread, or under any such pressure as would be commensurate with War Department orders compelling him to write an essay, we find him "Guilty, with a recommendation to mercy." But if, as the major part of the evidence shows, he has desired to exploit himself at the expense of the United States Army, we convict him, and there is no mercy for him!

Let us look at the dummies composing the battery which he has trained upon us.

"The United States Army is an antiquated survival."

"The United States Army is a body of mercenaries."

"The United States Army is raised with great difficulty."

"One-third of the United States Army are foreigners."

"The United States Army contains not a few illiterate."

"Nearly ten per cent. of the Army deserts yearly."

"The frequency of courts-martial is alarming."

"The regular army is a last resort."

"Officers form a hierarchical caste."

"The United States Army costs the people forty-eight millions a year."

"The United States ought not to be prepared to repel an attack from the outside."

Consider first, as he says, that the United States army is as much out of place in this progressive nation of sixty-five millions, as would be a coat of mail upon a modern battlefield, or a wooden ship in the next naval encounter! From things in reality antiquated, let us turn attention to things which the experience and usages of all time, since the world began, have wrought out for us.

There is only one sense in which, by a great strain of the meaning of the word, the United States army can be said to be antiquated. If the accumulated experience of all ages, and of all countries, teaches that a strong right arm is indispensable to the head that administers the laws; if the long-established quality or essence of a thing; entitles it to be called antiquated, then may the United States army be said to be antiquated. But more is the purpose of this fling than centers about the duration of years. The idea of obsolescence is the metal in this particular dummy. As well say that the custom of drinking when thirsty; of eating when hungry; of protecting the weak; of controlling and subduing the vicious; of locking treasure vaults; of cladding ships

with iron; of resisting the ferocity of wild beasts; of staying the invaders of all nations and climes, who are forever waiting to encroach upon the defenceless; as well say that the customary duty and action in the connections mentioned have become obsolete, as to make that affirmation of the United States army!

Observe the elements of disintegration in Mr. McCrackan's very words. The army is as much out of place in this nation as a "coat of mail upon a modern battlefield," or a "wooden ship in the next naval encounter." Observe the quite correct appreciation, which, apparently unawares, creeps out of his own language touching what has become in reality obsolete, and touching what is not obsolete, and setting forth the universally recognized principles in wars upon land and sea, which are yet to come and inevitable. In other words, wars have not become obsolete, but he will have it that the means of conducting them are no longer necessary. There are battlefields and naval encounters just beyond the veil of to-morrow; but no regular army is required! Did he ever contemplate what this progressive nation of sixty-five millions would have been, or would become, in the absence of the army he abuses! Imagination can hardly picture the decay, the shame which this nation would without doubt be offering to ~~the~~ ~~voyage,~~ the gaze of mankind! After becoming tributary to some other nation, the American people would be whipped and scuffed from the face of the earth, obliterated as a people, and succeeded by a people more worthy to occupy the land! Our adversary, while gazing eastwardly upon Switzerland, seems to have been wilfully oblivious to the westward trend of population, commerce and wealth, within our own boundaries, and all those things which redound to a nation's glory, and which have most indubitably depended upon, and had their creating force in, the United States army!

The United States Army—which he styles a body of mercenaries! Where can the man, or body of men, be found, outside of the lunatic, pauper, prisoner and barbarian classes, who does not work for pay? What civilized beings are there who lie down upon soft couches, and, looking up to heaven, have food and drink drop from nowhere into their mouths, and raiment, to fit and to please, automatically come and clothe their bodies? And what people of equal intelligence and capacity, give their lives and their services for more moderate rewards than soldiers of the

United States Army? There are laws in this world from which there is no escape. One of these laws is that you shall not have a thing of value from your fellow-men for nothing. It is fair exchange that is no robbery. The benefits of peace and good order, the security of life and family and property, the unhindered pursuit of liberty and happiness, are worth more than can be expressed by the enumeration of dollars and cents. While the easily calculated cost for rations, pay, clothing, transportation and shelter of the United States soldiers is not only a tax of less than fifty cents a year (less than a nickle a month) to each American citizen—and even that finds its way, in the main, back to the country's coffers and channels of trade—are the soldiers of the United States Army mercenaries? So is the lawyer; so is the schoolmaster; so is the clergyman; so is the merchant; so is the legislator; so is the literary man!

There is truth in the statement that the United States Army is raised with difficulty; but the truth is not on the side of the McCrackan argument. What is the difficulty? Not in the number applying for admission. I have the facts for the statement that for 250 men accepted into the Army, in a period of twenty-five months, nearly 3,000 made application. But twelve men out of every hundred making known their desire to enter, under the rigid rules of the recruiting service, came up to the mental, moral and physical requirements. The United States Army is getting the cream of American manhood; whereas, according to Mr. McCrackan, it is getting nothing but skim milk, and mighty little of that. It may very naturally happen that many intelligent communities, in their entirety, know very little of the stamp of men who are in the ranks to-day; of the high average mentality; of the physical superiority; of bodies as nearly without blemish as was rigorously demanded of sacrifices to Jehovah in Bible history; and of character and reputation similarly without blemish, as far as it be possible to secure for any army upon the footstool.

I affirm that it might prove very astonishing and not a little humiliating, for the majority of even that class who animadvert upon the United States Army, to know that it would be impossible for them to pass the examination for admission. There is a saying that nothing worth having in this world can be had except by hard work. Gold is hard to get. Dirt can be picked up any-

where. There is the definition of the great difficulty with which the United States Army is raised.

The objections that officers form a hierarchical class, is another puerile objection, against an order of things established from the foundation of the world. Principles are immutable. Said the Philosopher Poet:

Order is heaven's first law, and, this confessed,
Some are and must be, greater than the rest.

In the material world, if one would secure the greatest possible power by the employment of the units from which the power is derived, how futile to employ those units separately, or with as many different directions and impulses as there are units. On the other hand, combine and band such units together, like the cemented parts of masonry, like the parts in the locomotive driver, like the details of the architecture of the Leviathans that cover the ocean, and you see, in each case, a grand, resulting unit, fit for the accomplishment of great ends.

Again, take the view of this question, as offered in the assembling of men outside of the military, in the many occupations of the world at large—in building railroads and houses and bridges, in mines and factories, in merchandising, in charitable and religious enterprises—what headway or success could be made without the combinations of individuals; and to what useful purpose would such combinations tend, except, in all cases, there be those whose function it is to order, to direct, to command? Has Mr. McCrackan anything to say against all that hierarchy of superintendents, master-mechanics, captains, chief clerks, engineers, bishops and deacons?

Mistaken conclusions always and inevitably result from exclusively contemplating one feature, or one side, or one aspect of a composite thing. Government is a composite thing. Blackstone says that "the three grand requisites, of goodness, of wisdom, and of power ought to be found in every well constituted frame of government." Now, it is plain that our adversary of the quill has been gazing too exclusively, and with blurred vision, at one element of the power of the United States. Would he behold it in its true relationship and importance, let him stand back a little and take a new point of view, and turn the subject of the power of our government over in all of its aspects. At the foundation of all, there must be laws; the laws will not always

enforce themselves. Two instrumentalities are provided, the civil and the military, in that order of precedence. Erase the military, and what do you do? You have taken the feet and limbs away which support the head and trunk of the body politic, and the backbone has disappeared as well. If we look to the other requisites of government, which will save and rescue: wisdom, or goodness, or both?

Optimism in these two directions has few followers. Employing an old-fashioned and time-honored implement of the farm, the three-legged milking stool, as an illustration of the specimen of iconoclasm now under consideration, let us do away with one of the three supports, and behold the condition of unstable equilibrium—of maid, milking pail and milk! Heaven forbid that the Goddess of Liberty should ever find herself in an analogous situation!

And so, one-third of the United States Army are foreigners, are they? And what objection can Mr. McCrackan or any other man with that same first syllable to his name, consistently offer to the foreigners in our army? Is he of American lineage so aboriginal as to justify him in a slur at foreign ancestry more or less remote? Is he just now so afflicted with Americo-mania as to close his mouth, his eyes, his ears, and to refuse to inflate his lungs, were he all at once landed in Paris, London or Berlin? In the words of a recent publicist, "All of us are so near the alien "line that prejudice against foreigners is scarcely consistent." Be it known that the foreigners in our Army form a most welcome and soldierly and valuable integer in our forces. It is not the slightest reflection in the world upon the United States Army that it contains a goodly number of those who have been subjects of older nations than our own; nations in which the art of war has, from time immemorial, been the business of the inhabitants; generation after generation having been governed and moulded by military ideas. The foreigners in our army are very apt to be men of military antecedents, some of them having family traditions transmitted from the days and by veritable actors of the great campaigns, and under great commanders, of which and of whom our historians have to make mention, and whence cometh instruction for the military student. And be it known that the foreigners as well as the Americans in our army are not of the skim milk variety. What officer is at a loss to call to mind the

brave and loyal Irishman, the man of unquestioning obedience to orders? or the reliable, the clean, the methodical Dutchman?

Touching the subject of aliens throughout our land, let us see how it stands. A bulletin from the Census Office shows the following: In the western division, comprising Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, the aliens make up almost one half of the population—43.67. In the North Atlantic division, they make 47.21 of the total, while in the South Atlantic, Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, the Virginias, the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida, only 6.92, and in the South-Central, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas, 7.59.

Taking the entire country, therefore, in 1890, the percentage of aliens was 33.02. How reasonable that the United States Army should tally with the nation at large in its proportion of aliens and non-aliens! With exceptionable accuracy Mr. McCrackan states that the percentage of aliens in our army is one-third. The latest census bulletin puts the Nation's percentage of aliens almost precisely at the same figures. What nicer adjustment of percentages could be desired! The official figures, however, as handed into the United States Senate by the Secretary of War, the other day, show that the percentage of aliens in the United States Army is very nearly one-fourth.

And now, were a comparison of the illiterate to be made, between our Nation and our Army, or between our Army and any army that ever marched, is there anybody so fundamentally ignorant as to lift his voice in unfavorable allusion to the United States Army? How this man has racked his brains to trump up indictments against us! The saying that "where there's a will, there's a way" was never better illustrated, especially a wrong way. The United States Army has never claimed to be literary. In propriety, of course, it should make no boasts of any kind, but simply be grateful to its friends, who will speak for it. To a body of men whose motto is "Deeds, not Words," among whom brave and splendid action is the corollary of disciplined minds and bodies, among whom the verses of Virgil and Horace cut no figure in comparison with respect for authority and loyalty to duty—to such a body of men, we do not apply the standards by which

orators, professors and men of letters are judged. Right to the point, is what Macaulay said of Oliver Cromwell:

“Wherefore you speak contemptibly of his parts, I know not. But I suspect you are not free from the error common to studious and speculative men. Because Cromwell was an ungraceful orator, and never said, either in public or private, anything memorable, you will have it that he was of mean capacity. Sure this is unjust! Many men have there been ignorant of letters, without wit, without eloquence, who yet had the wisdom to devise, and the courage to perform, that which they lacked language to explain. Such men often, in troubled times, have worked out the deliverance of nations, and their own greatness —not by logic, not by rhetoric, but by wariness in success, by calmness in danger, by fierce and stubborn resolution in all adversity. The hearts of men are their books. Events are their tutors. Great actions are their eloquence.”

I shall now proceed to consider in what sort the Army is a “last resort.” Let us take up this ill-tempered affirmation, and see what it is worth. Let us admit that it is true, to a degree, that the Army has been, to some, a last resort. Is that, of necessity, a grave indictment against the Army! Is it to be regretted, on the score of private or public good, that the Army offers an honorable opening and profession to men who have theretofore been unsuccessful and unfortunate in other pursuits?

As before stated, false impressions are broadcast in relation to the Army. But charge that not to the Army! Charge it, in the first place, to the almost universal ignorance, of which men, in their own lives and business, are guilty, touching the lives and business of others who may be near them or who may be remote. Charge it, in part, to the conceit and preference for the affairs and the locality with which a man is identified, in comparison with the uncertain and unknown of another sphere in life. Charge a great deal of it to the disinclination of the average man to place himself for a term of years under the proverbial strictness and restraint of a military life.

Taking his specious views, one might go the whole length with Mr. McCrackan, in his doctrine of the undesirability of the Army for a livelihood, by listening to many applicants, who come into the recruiting office and say that their reason for enlisting is that times are hard, and they cannot find anything to do.

But, right here, let it be distinctly understood that such a declaration is no passport to the Army! Nine times out of ten, just the contrary! The recruiting office is not the only place where men of that description apply for a job, when hard up; and what reflection is it upon the grocers, the butchers, the bakers, the tailors, the carpenters, the painters, that men, unsmiled upon by fortune, should seek a job among their ranks, as constantly happens in every town and city of the land? Hard times swell the number of the unemployed, of course. But, taking all trades and professions in view, the Army is far down in the list as to quantity of legitimate candidates for employment. Indeed, when the conditions of eligibility for employment in the Army, as to eyes, ears, teeth, mind and limb, character and reputation, are brought to mind, we are again making the comparison, perforce, of the process of gold-sifting! On the other hand, what is to be inferred from applicants, also many, who go to the recruiting office to consummate the ambition of their lives? I have known them. I recall a man who came to me and said: "My father was nine times wounded and three times made prisoner, and my uncle was a general in the war. I am old enough to enlist now, and I want to keep our name at the front." I recall quite a multitude, in the total, who, at different times, have come to me, saying: "We have always liked the Military; we have been in the Militia and have learned the drill, and now we want to do some real soldiering." And, too, I recall the disappointment which often settled upon the faces of men, sound and suitable for almost any other avocation, who did not come up to the requirements of the examination for enlistment.

Would that "studious and speculative men," as Maccaulay described them, were more "studious" and less "speculative" when they write up the United States Army for the contemplation of the Public!

The next dummy we will touch and explode is—"The frequency of Courts-Martial is alarming." What does he mean? He says that Court-Martial is frequent. Its frequency is alarming. The Court-Martial of whom? Of officers? Or of men? Does he mean the Court-Martial, by repetition, of individuals? Or the total brought to trial? And who is to blame—the misbehaving, or those who draw up the charges, or those convening the Courts? I deliberately affirm that the author of the state-

ment dwells in Cimmerian darkness touching the various phases of the subjects here alluded to.

It is conceivable that a Court-Martial would be more or less alarming to the man arraigned and tried. It is also conceivable, by a severe exercise of the imagination, that the people of the United States, to a very trifling extent, regard the Court-Martial statistics of the Army as indicating a bad state of discipline and morals, and so fraught with danger to the land. But they may rest their souls in peace. Let them come away from the fantastical dish set before them. Regarding one possible meaning of our critic, that the hierarchy of officers are the accusers, and the "mercenary" and "illiterate" soldiers the accused, the former persecuting the latter with unnecessary severity, this may perhaps be the place to state the facts in their general tenor. What is true of one garrison is very apt to be true of any other. That is, there is no reason to doubt that the occasions of trial and the relationship of officers and men, in that regard, are pretty much alike throughout the entire Army. Therefore, conclusions drawn from the experience of any of us, at any or all of the stations where we have served, may safely be taken to characterize and comprehend the whole subject. Utterly destroying, demolishing and over-turning the theory that officers habitually persecute and harass their men, is the law of self-interest, and its certain operation throughout human society. The interest of the men and the interest of the officer are one and the same. The regard and solicitude the officer has for the comfort, the welfare, and the contentment of his men, is so invariable and commonplace, as seldom to be remarked among military men. Is it likely, then, that the officer will needlessly harass his men by Courts-Martial and punishments if he can possibly, and for the best interest of all, avoid doing so? In every organization, almost without exception, the candidates for Court Martial are a very small quota of the whole. Let it be emphasized that the generality of soldiers are self-respecting, observant, well behaved, worthy members of their immediate community—most suitable servants and defenders of their country.

Touching the attitude of officers towards the really few offenders against discipline—it is one of patience and repeated condonation. But how little of the truth of this—to which the experi-

ence of every officer who has commanded a troop or company is witness—is to be gathered from the missive which has been brought to our attention ! A further sinister meaning is contained in the exaggerated statement in regard to desertion, chargeable, as it were, to interior mismanagement of the Army. There is the familiar saying that water will not rise higher than its source. The country-at-large is the source of the Army. The estimation in which the crime of desertion is held by the country-at-large is the undoubted explanation, to a large degree, of the desertions. It is outside of the Army that missionary work upon that subject is needed. Why deserters are harbored and without reason sympathized with, among civilians, ought to be an interesting and fruitful topic for the consideration of “studious” and “speculative” writers.

This is one of the peculiarities of human nature which will probably never be eradicated, and, it has a leaning to the side of virtue when the exemplification consists in a generous man befriending a fugitive from military slavery, as depicted by some public writers. A cardinal principle, to be sure, of the American people, is that their land shall evermore be the asylum of the oppressed. But here is a case in which the truth has been abused without mercy and for the time being, at least, is seeking a refuge in the Army ! Dummies cannot hit the mark except by accident, of course. Here the tendency has been to over-shoot. He says that ten per cent. of the Army deserts yearly. The cannoneer has taken very coarse sight and somewhere about double proper elevation. And the same as respects his statement that the Army costs the people yearly forty-eight millions, one half of which sum is about the correct figure. Is it that McCrackan regards 24,000,000 dollars a trifle by which he would willingly have one of his mistakes weighed and measured ! If, in this dissertation, it be a fact that the defining and the consideration of “Our Military Fever” has found a small place, the same fact is to be noticed in the article to which our observations have been addressed.

That writer upon “Social and economic questions” injects the words, “our military fever,” once into his composition and then proceeds to give the Army Hail Columbia ! Does a fusilade upon the regular Army demonstrate military fever anywhere ? How bravely, with pen in hand, has he been able, after all, to elbow

his way through his fever-stricken crowd, without taking the contagion ! But let us try to define his subject, from his own standpoint. What would he have us understand by the term, "Our Military Fever?" Does he not mean it to be inferred that the American people have displayed a temporary, exaggerated, undesirable, unnatural, over-appreciation of the profession of arms? Upon its face, is not that the meaning of the phrase? Unquestionably, the attention of its author was drawn to the disturbance, of national dimensions, occurring in the summer of 1894, and for the quieting of which the strong arm of the military was absolutely indispensable. The effective use of the military was a gratification to the law-abiding, a decided setback to law-breakers, and a revelation to both classes that the government had such a prop in the regular army. The fever was not a military fever. The remedy for a disease should not be confounded with the disease itself. The medicine that cures does not aptly describe a fever, except as a contrasting term. The military ardor of the people of the United States rises whenever there is occasion for it, and, as illustrative of its quick abatement, behold the press and the legislators of the land, in the main, concurring that the military establishment, invaluable as it has proved itself, shall remain in *statu quo*. It is reasonable to conclude that an effort to reduce the army, in spite of the events of 1894, would stand a good prospect of success.

Surely, the symptoms of military fever are conspicuous by their absence.

As a military power upon this hemisphere, the United States stands first.

As a military power upon the continent of which it forms a part, our country is irresistible.

Take away the sinews of war of this country, and what would be its classification?

D. C. PEARSON,
Captain, 2d Cavalry.

Fort Wingate, N. M., March 21, 1895.

